

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 4341
House Regulatory Reform Committee
MARCH 25, 2009

TOM CLEVELAND
Cancer Survivor

Good Afternoon.

Mr. Chairman, members of the Committee, my name is Tom Cleveland. I'm from Kalamazoo, Michigan. I am here today in support of a comprehensive statewide smokefree air law. I know firsthand the dangers of tobacco and secondhand smoke.

I smoked 3 packs a day before I quit.

I smoked for 30 years.

I lost my father on Valentine's Day 1984 from cancer. You would think I would have quit smoking, but I did not.

In February, 1995, I was diagnosed with stage III Laryngeal Cancer (cancer of the voice box).

On April 21st, my throat was cut open and my Larynx, my thyroid, and the tumor were removed. Afterwards, I had 27 treatments of radiation over a 6-week period.

I was then stapled shut and fed by a tube inserted through my nose into my stomach and sutured to my nose. There was a lot of pain associated with this surgery. When I would finally fall asleep I would roll over and pull on the hose that was sutured to my nose and wake up from a sharp pain in my nose that felt like I had just been stuck with a burning needle. This indeed brought tears to my eyes.

The radiation treatments burned my neck and throat and the area burned looked like a raw piece of meat that was left in the refrigerator too long. The bright side of radiation therapy is that I still do not have to shave my lower neck. I drank a thick pain medicine that would coat my throat and relieve some of the pain so I could tolerate it better. Pain is a strange feeling sometimes. It can make you think and understand.

For the first six (6) months I had no way to communicate except with a note pad or a dry-erase board. I finally found out about a device that is called an electrolarynx and started using it. This is how I sounded.(use the EL) This was embarrassing to me for a time until I got use to using it and understood that this is how I will have to communicate. Then I was introduced to a device called "voice prosthesis." This meant I would have to have another surgery again to put in the prosthesis. This surgery required a hole to be put in the wall between my Esophagus and Trachea; known as a Tracheoesophageal puncture.

For about two weeks after this surgery, I was fed once again through a tube that was put into my stomach and sutured to my nose. I had my prosthesis put in and this is now how I sound which I like much better.

Once upon a time, I was very involved in music as a singer and a soloist. I was in a quartet and choir. Oh, how I miss my voice.

I cannot and usually do not go into a place that allows smoking because I cannot breathe the air and I do not want cancer again.

I feel it is not fair to those who work in such a deadly environment, and changing jobs for most is not an option.

Please support HB 4341-legislation that would make all restaurants, bars, and casinos smokefree. This bill would protect many from secondhand smoke and will help our health care system by having less people sick from secondhand smoke. Also, smokefree policies encourage smokers to quit smoking. Many smokers want to quit and when the places that they spend a majority of their time, like their job, are smokefree, it provides a supportive environment for them to do so. I wish that I could have had the support to quit.

Nearly 80 percent of Michigan residents are non-smokers. Everyone has the right to have the right to breathe smokefree air. Please protect our health by supporting HB 4341.

Please pass this bill with NO exceptions. Keep our children and workers safe.

Thank you.

